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ABSTRACT

The use of effective professional development strategies to improve the quality of teaching has become a critical aspect of school improvement across states. This report covers many aspects of this idea including: (1) Types of Peer Coaching Programs, (2) Effective Peer Coaching Strategies, (3) Necessary Support for a Peer Coaching Program, and (4) Problems Associated with Peer Coaching. (Author/AMT)

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Enhancing Teacher Quality: Peer Coaching as a Professional Development Strategy

A Preliminary Synthesis of the Literature

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Enhancing Teacher Quality:
Peer Coaching as a Professional Development Strategy

A Preliminary Synthesis of the Literature

by Kenneth Wong and Anna Nicotera

Peer Coaching as a Professional Development Strategy

The use of effective professional development strategies to improve the quality of teaching has become a critical aspect of school improvement initiatives across states. Title II of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 provides funding to states to develop professional development programs that use standards or assessments for assisting teachers that are consistent with academic achievement standards and provide for activities proven to be effective, such as teacher mentoring, team teaching, and reduced class schedules (NCLB [2113(c)(2)(A-B)]). Kentucky, for example, has used its newly awarded Title II grants to develop mentoring or coaching support for new teachers at school sites for a 2-year period. Ohio has adopted the Quality Impact Team, a coaching model operated through a collaboration between the Center for Essential School Reform and the Ohio Department of Education, to engage in intensive teacher development in the lowest performing districts. Several teacher quality organizations identify a consistent set of effective components for professional development programs, which include the concept of teacher peer coaching (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996; National Staff Development Council, 2001).

In the article "The Evolution of Peer Coaching," Showers and Joyce (1996) examine the history of coaching. Peer coaching began in the early 1980s as a strategy to improve the degree of implementation of new curriculum and instructional techniques. Showers and Joyce write that early research showed that "teachers who had a coaching relationship—that is, who shared aspects of teaching, planned together, and pooled their experiences—practiced new skills and strategies more frequently and applied them more appropriately than did their counterparts who

worked alone to expand their repertoires" (Showers & Joyce, 1996, p. 14). Peer coaching has typically operated as a process of collaborative planning, observation, and feedback, rather than serving as a formal evaluation or review, in order to increase the level of implementation of instructional techniques and curriculum (Ackland, 1991; Odell, 1990; Perkins, 1998; Showers & Joyce, 1996).

This research synthesis reviews the types of peer coaching, identifies a set of effective strategies, discusses the necessary support structures, and examines the potential problems related to peer coaching programs.

Types of Peer Coaching Programs

Variations of the term *peer coaching* appear in the literature, such as *technical coaching*, *team coaching*, *collegial coaching*, *cognitive coaching*, and *challenge coaching*. Research suggests that the terms can be grouped into three general categories based on the professional development strategies used. Technical coaching and team coaching focus on incorporating new curriculum and instructional techniques into teachers' routines (Ackland, 1991; Becker, 1996; Showers & Joyce, 1996). Collegial coaching and cognitive coaching seek to improve existing teacher practices by refining techniques, developing collegiality, increasing professional dialogue, and assisting teachers to reflect on their teaching (Ackland, 1991; Becker, 1996; Showers & Joyce, 1996). The third type of coaching, challenge coaching, concentrates on identifying and treating a specific problem and can be used in a larger context than the classroom such as a school or grade level (Ackland, 1991; Becker, 1996). The peer coaching strategies differ among these categories, but all of the programs use peers to achieve the goal of improving the teaching and learning process. The specific peer coaching strategies identified in the literature are discussed in the next section.

The most common use of peer coaching programs has been for beginning teachers with fewer than 3 years of experience. Research on induction programs finds that beginning teachers

benefit from a formal and structured induction team approach rather than from informal mentoring programs (Klug & Salzman, 1991). Currently, 19 states and the District of Columbia require teacher mentoring programs for beginning teachers, and 10 of the remaining states have established voluntary mentoring programs for beginning teachers (Bonelli, 1999). The data do not indicate the prevalence of peer coaching programs for teachers with more than 3 years of experience. Research demonstrates, though, that peer coaching programs encourage professional growth, recognition, experience-enhancing roles, and collegiality for teacher mentors (Killion, 1990).

Effective Peer Coaching Strategies

A number of strategies are used by peer coaching programs. Table 1 reviews several articles that examine and compare research on effective peer coaching strategies to determine which approaches are the most common. As can be seen in Table 1, several strategies appear in a majority of the articles. These approaches can be classified into four broad categories of practice: (1) establishing a culture of standards and expectations, (2) improving instructional capacity, (3) supporting a process of ongoing evaluation, and (4) connecting classroom practices to policy context.

In the articles reviewed, controversy arose in the use of two specific strategies: incorporating feedback into the peer coaching process and using peer coaching to evaluate teachers. The use of feedback by mentors in peer coaching typically follows observations as a way to reflect on what was seen. Showers and Joyce disagree with the use of verbal feedback in the peer coaching process because of its similarity to supervision, which weakens collaboration. Rather than promoting a feedback loop, Showers and Joyce believe that the peer coaching process should focus on the components of planning and developing curriculum and instruction (Showers & Joyce, 1996). Showers and Joyce were the only authors to suggest eliminating feedback from the peer coaching process.

Only the article by Wanzare and da Costa (2000) suggests using peer coaching to evaluate teachers in a peer review process. The other articles state that peer coaching should remain distinct and separate from evaluation. The issue of peer coaching and evaluation is controversial partly because many unions prohibit peer review. "New unionism," though, has begun to consider peer review as a mechanism to increase teacher responsibility in schools. In their article, Wanzare and da Costa propose that peer coaching programs could create an environment conducive to peer review.

The list of peer coaching strategies in Table 1 is by no means definitive; it is merely a review of approaches that appear most frequently in the literature on peer coaching. To develop an effective peer coaching program, the purpose of that program should be considered first to determine the appropriate strategies.

Necessary Support for a Peer Coaching Program

Several of the strategies in Table 1 relate to the support necessary for an effective peer coaching program. For example, establishing a culture conducive to collegial and professional interaction is critical. Becker's (1996) review of peer coaching literature identified effective strategies, as well as a list of support components that should be included in a peer coaching program:

- Trusting relationships among all participants
- Administrative support (emotional, organizational, financial)
- Faculty and staff recognition of the need for improvement and formal ongoing learning
- Clear expectations for engagement
- Assessment methods for measuring the outcomes for the experience
- Release time for peer coaches
- Funds to pay for training and personnel

This list highlights the importance of trust among participants, logistical planning, provision of resources from the administration, and the need for evaluation of the initiative.

Problems Associated with Peer Coaching

The problems that may result from a peer coaching program are problems that occur in many school reform programs: insufficient training, limited resources, and lack of evaluation. Research on peer coaching cites the need for quality training for the coaches to develop an effective professional development program (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Holloway, 2001; Perkins, 1998).

Many schools and districts have limited access to funds for professional development. In peer coaching programs, teachers often leave their classrooms to observe another teacher, which may require a substitute teacher. Additionally, time is required for collaborative planning and development of lesson plans. These are resource and logistics issues that the administration must solve through reallocation and restructuring of the school to ensure an effective program.

Developing a formal evaluation process of the peer coaching program at the school or district level is essential to the program's success. Some schools and districts do not have the capacity to determine the ways that a program impacts teachers and students. In these systems, effort should be made to collaborate with local universities or organizations that have the capacity to evaluate peer coaching programs.

Conclusions

The purpose of this literature synthesis has been to review the research on peer coaching to determine the types of programs and strategies proven to be effective. Peer coaching is one of many professional development strategies. The strength of peer coaching lies in its potential to promote a culture of collaboration and professionalism among teachers. It is also designed to improve the level of implementation of new instructional techniques and curriculum. The

challenge of this model lies in the extent to which coaches have adequate training, the program operation receives sufficient resources, and an evaluation process is available.

To assist state, district, and school leadership, we have developed an assessment tool, or analytic template (Table 2). Leadership at all levels of the school policy system can use the analytic tool to assess the effectiveness of their role in supporting coaching activities.

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Table 1: Effective Peer Coaching Strategies Identified in the Research Literature

Peer Coaching Strategies	*Beginning teacher mentor programs* (Bonelli, 1999)	*Developing an effective teacher mentor program* (Heller & Sindelar, 1991)	*The evolution of peer coaching* (Showers & Joyce, 1996).	*Peer coaching for improvement of teaching and learning* (Becker, 1996)	*A review of the peer coaching literature* (Ackland, 1991)	*Supervision and staff development: Overview of the literature* (Wanzare & da Costa, 2000)
Development of a Professional Culture						
Establish rationale for peer coaching program at school		X		X		
Redesign the workplace of a school for collaboration and team planning			X			X
Establish a coaching culture that values collegial interaction and professionalism among participants		X	X	X	X	X
Define the roles of mentor and mentoree: reciprocal or expert coaching		X	X		X	
Have all teachers agree to participate in peer coaching			X			
Set criteria for the selection of mentors		X				
Building Instructional Capacity						
Determine logistics, such as incentives and class coverage				X	X	
Provide training for mentors		X				
Establish an ongoing process supported by modeling, coaching, collaboration, and problem solving			X	X		X
Focus on linking new information to existing knowledge, experience, and values			X	X	X	X
Mentors advise about instructional content and strategies	X		X			
Mentors share new ideas on curriculum and instruction			X	X		
Mentors demonstrate classroom instruction	X		X			X
Ongoing Support for Evaluation						
Mentors observe classroom instruction regularly	X		X	X	X	X
Mentors provide support and companionship	X		X		X	
Mentors consult about lesson plans and objectives	X		X			
Mentors provide feedback and assistance through analysis of application	X				X	
Omit verbal feedback in peer coaching process			X			
Allow for experimentation of teaching strategies						X
Encourage reflection on the teaching and learning process			X	X		X
Evaluate the peer coaching program to determine the impact of the initiative on students and teachers		X	X	X	X	
Make peer coaching distinct from evaluation			X	X	X	
Use peer coaching for peer review and evaluation						X
Linking Classroom Practices to Policy Context						
Give advice regarding school and district resources and student and parent relations	X					
Inform about the expectations of the school, district, and state	X					

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Table 2: Assessment Tool for States, Districts, and Schools on Coaching Strategies

	Effective Peer Coaching Strategies Identified in the Research Literature	State Role in Supporting Coaching Strategies in Districts	District Role in Supporting Coaching Strategies in Schools	School Leadership in Supporting Coaching Strategies
Development of a Professional Culture	Establish rationale for peer coaching program at school			
	Set criteria for the selection of coaches			
	Redesign the workplace of a school for collaboration and team planning			
	Establish a coaching culture that values collegial interaction and professionalism among participants			
	Define the roles of mentor and mentoree: reciprocal or expert coaching			
	Have all teachers agree to participate in peer coaching			
Building Instructional Capacity	Provide training for coaches			
	Determine logistics, such as incentives and class coverage			
	Establish an ongoing process supported by modeling, coaching, collaboration, and problem solving			
	Focus on linking new information to existing knowledge, experience, and values			
	Coaches give advice about instructional content and strategies			
	Coaches share new ideas on curriculum and instruction			
	Coaches demonstrate classroom instruction			
Ongoing Support for Evaluation	Make peer coaching distinct from teacher evaluation			
	Coaches observe classroom instruction regularly			
	Coaches provide support and companionship			
	Coaches consult about lesson plans and objectives			
	Coaches provide feedback and assistance through analysis of teacher application of strategies			
	Allow for experimentation of teaching strategies			
	Encourage reflection on the teaching and learning process			
	Evaluate the peer coaching program to determine the impact of the initiative on students and teachers			
Linking Classroom Practices to Policy Context	Give advice regarding school and district resources and student and parent relations			
	Coaches inform teachers about the expectations of the school, district, and state			

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